

Visit With The Utays October 2002

*School Psychology and Education Specialists
Reprinted from Northern Connections*

Dr Joe Utay, graduate of University of Pittsburgh, is a school psychologist, marriage and family therapist, author, national speaker, teacher, clinic director, and father. He earned tenure as a professor training counselors and school psychologists and is now Director of Counseling and Evaluation Services for TLC and part-time professor for Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Carol Utay, graduate of University of Pittsburgh, is an expert in curriculum, learning, special education, and technology. She has experience as a principal, teacher, consultant, national speaker, professor, author, and mother. "Dr. Carol" is Executive Director of Total Learning Centers.



HOMework PROBLEMS? IT MUST BE AUTUMN

Lots of questions about how to solve homework problems inevitably signals the return of autumn.

- *"We have nightly intense discussions over when homework is to be done."*
- *"My children rush through their homework and when I have them redo it, they balk."*
- *"My son constantly forgets to bring home homework assignments, books, and other needed materials."*
- *"My daughter is at least as intelligent as her friends but spends much longer on homework than they do."*
- *"I hate to call my own child lazy, but when it comes to homework..."*

Why bother with homework? As parents, we can point to research indicating that homework directly affects achievement in school. It also teaches responsibility and the important value of doing something we need to do even when we don't want to do it. We hope it can be a source of pride at the accomplishment or simple enjoyment of "getting into" an interesting topic. Homework is also an important link between school and home. Teachers have

their own answers to this question depending on the purpose of the specific assignment. However, what do kids answer when asked the purpose of homework? "Torture," "To be mean," and, "I don't know" seem to be popular responses.

It is certainly not vital that children understand, much less agree with, the rationale for homework. But, it is useful to have and convey empathy for many students' lack of motivation for completing what seems to parents and teachers to be pretty straightforward and reasonable expectations. This will work wonders in minimizing your children's perceived need to defend themselves from your attempt at (from your perspective) caring guidance.

Empathy helps clear the trail, but is definitely not sufficient to ensure movement down the often winding path toward preparing for, doing, and turning in the homework. The following is an abbreviated minimum checklist of practical considerations:

- Set up a study area set up with all necessary supplies.

- Establish and post a daily homework time, even if, for example, Monday's time is completely different than Tuesday's.
- Make sure your child knows how to use an assignment book.
- Remember to praise your child's efforts at independent homework.
- Find out your school's and teacher's guidelines on how long homework should take.
- Is attention from you (even though it is negative attention) more important than the homework?
- Does the teacher know of the homework battles? If not, include the school as an ally.

If the basics are in place, not just assumed, and homework is still a consistent problem, here are questions that can lead you to a solution:

- Is it related to timing? Materials? Distractions?
- Does your child know to invest "homework time" every day even if no homework was assigned (to review and preview)?
- Is the work as a whole seem overwhelming and need to be divided up?
- Is your child's attention weaker than usual for his/her age?

After exhausting your options without success it is time to have your child evaluated to get a better handle on what is really going on. An educational evaluation by the school or learning center would help tease out the intermingled issues of academic skills, attention, intelligence, study habits, motivation, etc. Try first what you can by yourself and with the teacher. If needed though, get whatever help you need to help your child complete and turn in homework as one important way to prepare today for success tomorrow.

Read more back-to-school ideas at www.TotalLearningCenter.com or call (724) 940-1090 for a free copy of a TLC cd full of useful information for parents. **Please ask!** For more information and great websites to help with homework challenges, visit the Total Learning Center website: <http://www.TotalLearningCenter.com>.

Reprinted from Northern Connections, October 2002